

Western Amateur Bids Adieu to Point O' Woods

By Kelly Hill
Managing Editor

BENTON HARBOR - Tom Weiskopf, Andy North, Ben Crenshaw, Curtis Strange, Andy Bean, Hal Sutton, Scott Verplank, Phil Michelson, Justin Leonard and Tiger Woods.

What a lineup! Between them, those 10 golfers have won at least 196 PGA Tour events and 27 major championships.

Before that however, when they were amateur golfers, they combined to win 12 Western Amateur Championships.

And all of them won at Point O' Woods Golf and Country Club in

Benton Harbor.

Tom Weiskopf won the first Western Amateur played at Point O' Woods, in 1963. Andy North won the Western Am at Point O' Woods in 1971, the year that began a string of 38 consecutive years in which the tournament was played at Point O' Woods.

That string ends this year.

After hosting 38 straight Western Amateur Championships and 40 in the last 46 years, Point O' Woods Golf and Country Club is hosting its final Western Amateur Championship, for at least another five years.

"The club had a contract with the Western Golf Association and that contract has run out this year," said Dennis Mitchell, a Point O' Woods member for 21 years who served as Chairman of the Western Am in 2002, '03 and '04. "The tournament has had a great run and it is a great championship, but it has had its run."

Significant drops in attendance is one reason the tournament will be played at a different venue each year, and possibly return to Point O' Woods once every five years.

"There was a time when we would easily get 10,000 people for the entire week, but that's when



Photo courtesy of Western Golf Association Archives

**Tom Weiskopf, Western Amateur
Champion, 1963**



Photo courtesy of Western Golf Association Archives

**Andy North, Western Amateur
Champion, 1971**

Photo opposite page: Ryan Moore on his way to winning 2004 Western Amateur at Point O' Woods



Photo courtesy of Western Golf Association Archives

**Curtis Strange, Western Amateur
Champion, 1974**



Photo by Clarence Sormin

guys like Phil (Michelson) and Tiger (Woods) were playing,” Mitchell said. “Amateur golf is not a major event for spectators and there are not names out there in amateur golf like there used to be.

“There are also a lot more activities in Benton Harbor than there used to be,” Mitchell said. “In recent years there have been five weeks with something to do in the

summer and the tournament was the fifth week. It has been one thing after another, and in the past not all of this was a factor. We have seen a weakening of the attendance.”

According to Mitchell, the 2007 Western Am at Point O’ Woods drew fewer than 2,000 spectators, the entire week. “That had a lot to do with this,” Mitchell said. “We

thought it was a good time to make a change.”

While future sites of the Western Am are yet to be determined, the club and WGA have agreed that the championship will return to Point O’ Woods once every five years, but the club does not know where it will fit into the rotation of the event to various venues.

“Maybe now more people will come out for it,” Mitchell said. “Playing at a different venue every year doesn’t hurt, and this way it could be played at other Michigan courses, too.”

Crenshaw won the 1973 Western Am at Point O’ Woods, Strange won in ‘74 and Bean won in ‘75. Sutton won in 1979 and 1980, while Verplank won in ‘85. Michelson won in 1991 while Leonard won in 1992 and ‘93. Woods won at Point O’ Woods in 1994. *MG*



Hal Sutton, Western Amateur Champion in 1979 and 1980 and David Ogrin, 1980 Runner-up.



Justin Leonard, Western Amateur Champion, 1992 & 1993 and Runner-up 1991



Camillo Villegas, Western Amateur Co-Medalist with Kevin Stadler, 2002



Phil Mickelson, Western Amateur Champion, 1991



Tiger Woods, Western Amateur Champion, 1994



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